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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE UNITED NATIONS
HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Forty-third session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 474th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 6 October 1992, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. LANUS (Argentina)

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General debate (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

GENERAL DEBATE (agenda item 4) (continued)

1. Mr. AZIKIWE (Nigeria) said that the members of the Executive Committee should continue to respond to the legitimate wants of needy refugees by adapting to current realities and by accepting their responsibilities, after giving careful thought to how they could adopt new approaches to face new challenges. Naturally, the Committee's agenda should be more forward-looking and reflect the emerging refugee concerns of tomorrow instead of focusing on long debated topics of the past. The Executive Committee must create a constructive atmosphere in which delegations could have confidence that the plight of refugees would be given the very highest priority. There was no easy solution to those problems and only long-term programmes could achieve progress in the context of a multi-pronged approach involving the commitment of all member States.

2. The needs of refugees and displaced persons the world over constituted an enormous challenge which should be met by UNHCR with determination and effectiveness. The countless problems involved should not be seen from a regional perspective, since concerted efforts by the international community as a whole were needed to find durable solutions.

3. The International Meeting on Humanitarian Aid for Victims of the Conflict in the Former Yugoslavia, convened on 29 July 1992, had owed its success to the efforts of the High Commissioner and her staff to respond promptly to the needs of displaced persons in the area. Only the activities of the warring factions had occasionally disrupted the delivery of relief assistance, but, with the onset of winter, it was to be hoped that all parties involved would make concerted efforts to facilitate relief operations.

4. Although most delegations at the Executive Committee's forty-second session had expressed the hope that UNHCR would focus in 1992 on the repatriation and resettlement of displaced persons, it was once again faced with a new influx of refugees as a result of the deteriorating situation in some countries, especially the former Yugoslavia. "Traditional recipients", such as Afghanistan, the countries of the Horn of Africa and the Sudan, had suffered as world attention and resources had been diverted elsewhere and, in other regions, such as Latin America, Africa and Asia, there were millions of refugees who had been unable to return home due to the lack of resources and basic infrastructure needed for their reintegration. Durable solutions should be found to eliminate once and for all the unprecedented wave of new refugees.

5. His delegation believed that the fate of refugees the world over was in the hands of the international community and would welcome any initiative on the part of the Executive Committee for the holding of extraordinary meetings, as a demonstration of international solidarity, to consider the tragic situation of refugees in the Horn of Africa and in Afghanistan. The members of the international community could thus be made aware of the problems which were worsening day by day in those regions and which, if not urgently dealt with, might provoke a tragedy. Such meetings would provide an opportunity to formulate a plan of action for a more systematic, collective and long-term approach to the humanitarian challenges that were continually arising. They

would also make it possible to define more clearly ways of organizing and channelling increased material assistance to asylum countries in the regions concerned and would give donor countries an opportunity to come forward and offer adequate funding. However, the convening of such meetings would depend on positive donor response.

6. The Executive Committee should not overlook those developing countries which had accepted large numbers of refugees or underestimate the enormous efforts they were making to assist them. It hardly needed to be said that refugee-generating countries must put in place policies of participation and honour their obligations by abiding strictly by the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Democratic reforms should give them the political stability they needed to promote prosperity and to pass on to future generations a durable democratic inheritance. In such countries, repression and the use of force must not stifle growing political consciousness or stand in the way of liberalization. Any conflict, whether internal or external, was a setback for peace and arms support for the warring factions was contrary to the principle of the inviolability of national integrity or sovereignty. The international community should impose sanctions on countries which practised such selfish policies that led to conflicts, with the resulting refugee exoduses.

7. His delegation had always deplored the inadequacy of the financial and material resources for UNHCR's field operations, particularly in the Horn of Africa, but welcomed the admirable results that had nevertheless been achieved by the High Commissioner and her young collaborators, who were continuing to assist refugees despite the danger to their lives. The fact remained, however, that UNHCR's structure would need to be reviewed to enable it to meet the challenges of the future. It was disheartening to read criticism in the press of the inadequacies which were hampering UNHCR activities, especially in Africa. Mismanagement, waste and corruption were already taking their toll in terms of time and money, but they became more serious still when they resulted in loss of life and in further sufferings for refugees. There was a need for an uncompromising review of activities which might adversely affect UNHCR's capacity to remedy the plight of refugees. Cases of corruption could not fail to harm the Programme.

8. While commending, as it had always done, the High Commissioner's qualities and her work, his delegation believed that rationalization measures such as those already in place in other United Nations bodies had to be taken if the plight of refugees was not to be compounded by bureaucratic incompetence, evasion of responsibilities and fraud. Regulations had to be enforced to combat such a deplorable lack of ethics. The Executive Committee should also give serious consideration to the establishment of a panel of personalities outside the United Nations system to review the activities of field officers and persons responsible for the disbursement of funds.

9. In conclusion, he emphasized that the solution to current refugee problems did not necessarily mean abandoning present approaches, but, rather, adjusting and fine tuning them for the best possible results. UNHCR should put its house in order by adopting a more credible, flexible and effective means of implementing the programmes it had adopted.

10. Mr. HYNNINEN (Finland) said that Finland supported the strategy which had been announced by the High Commissioner at the Executive Committee's preceding session and was based on emergency preparedness, voluntary repatriation and the promotion of solutions through the adoption of preventive measures.

11. Preventive action should clearly form an integral part of UNHCR's mandate and should play a central role in its strategic planning, but, for some years, its limited human and financial resources had forced it to concentrate mainly on crisis management. That situation needed to be remedied in future by focusing more on prevention, particularly in volatile regions where there was a danger of mass displacements and where UNHCR had already initiated several programmes. Such a prevention strategy should be based on institution-building, information and training. The series of seminars on refugee law promotion that had been organized jointly with IOM and ICRC in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States was a good example of the kind of training needed. Since the success of such measures would naturally depend on the financial support received by UNHCR, his delegation believed that that type of activity should be included in the general programmes.

12. Since voluntary repatriation was the preferred durable solution for dealing with refugee situations because it enabled refugees to reintegrate in their countries of origin with the support of economic, social and political programmes, the success of repatriation programmes was determined by the degree of integration achieved. The active participation of development agencies and non-governmental organizations was essential in that regard and UNHCR should act as a catalyst to promote such cooperation, since the responsibilities of other United Nations agencies should be more clearly defined at the planning stage.

13. The international community as a whole should commit itself unreservedly to seeking comprehensive solutions to the refugee problem resulting from the tragic war - unprecedented in post-war Europe - currently raging in the former Yugoslavia. The Government of Finland, for its part, would give its full support to efforts already underway. Though it was true that the political dimension was the key to settlement of the conflict, it should be complemented by humanitarian measures. All the necessary human and financial resources should be mobilized without delay in order to avoid the tragic consequences that the approach of winter might have on the civilian population, particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Temporary protection was the key to an immediate response to the situation of such refugees, who should, as a general rule, be given relief as close to their homes as possible. However, the concept of temporary protection should under no circumstances be used to serve the purposes of those who practised "ethnic cleansing".

14. His Government, which had already made a contribution of 10 million markkaa, intended to make a further contribution of 18 million markkaa to finance relief activities in the former Yugoslavia. In addition, Finland had decided to receive persons belonging to the most vulnerable groups, under a selection process to be carried out in close collaboration with UNHCR.

15. However, the situation in the former Yugoslavia should not divert attention from emergency situations developing elsewhere. In the Horn of Africa, the tragic plight of Somalia had shocked the world. The complexity

and exceptional scale of the problem had prevented organizations of the United Nations system from tackling it in the best possible way and that incapacity had proved fatal for hundreds of thousands of people. It was now urgent to intensify efforts to find appropriate political and humanitarian solutions.

16. In keeping with its traditions, Finland was giving considerable support to voluntary repatriation programmes and other humanitarian relief activities being carried out in different regions of the African continent, but it was also one of the countries which had given the largest amount of support to the CIREFCA process in Central America.

17. Although UNHCR was regarded as concerning itself only with refugees as defined under the 1951 Convention, its mandate was flexible enough to allow it to intervene in "refugee-like" situations. In such cases, the request for intervention should come through the Secretary-General of the United Nations and UNHCR should be given assurances that it would be provided with the necessary financial and human resources.

18. In conclusion, he said that, since the various causes of population movements were increasingly interlinked, it was sometimes difficult to distinguish between flight and persecution and human rights violations and cases where living conditions had been made unbearable through deprivation. Much more research had to be carried out in order better to understand those different kinds of situation. Nevertheless, the scale of such mass movements and the various causes which underlay them should not be an obstacle to the granting of asylum to persons who met the criteria of the 1951 Convention. Better mechanisms should therefore be developed to distinguish legitimate asylum-seekers from others.

19. Mr. de RIEDMATTEN (Switzerland) said that, as had been recognized in the introduction to the Note on International Protection, the main features of today's refugee problem were its great complexity and the diversity of its root causes. Accordingly, the new challenges facing UNHCR and the countries of the international community called for great imagination on the part of the United Nations and for increased cooperation. The task of prevention, to which the High Commissioner had drawn particular attention, would mean that concerted long-term efforts would have to be made to defend and promote democracy, human rights, development and action to combat poverty.

20. Switzerland was ready to contribute actively to UNHCR in the search for durable solutions to the problem of refugees and it supported the proposal for the convening of one or more intersessional meetings of the Sub-Committee of the Whole on International Protection. With regard to UNHCR's activities in situations which were not directly covered by the 1951 Convention and in which UNHCR was often called on to intervene by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, he welcomed the results UNHCR had achieved Office as lead agency in the former Yugoslavia, despite the myriad political and operational obstacles it had encountered. In addition to taking direct action in the field and making substantial contributions both in cash and in kind, Switzerland, in keeping with its humanitarian traditions, had received some

70,000 persons who had suffered as a result of the conflict. It believed, like UNHCR, that temporary protection was often the best provisional solution to a refugee problem, provided that there was some burden-sharing, and it would be prepared to consider the setting up of a regionally based system of cooperation under which any massive influx of displaced persons could be managed in a coordinated way. The informal consultations should provide an opportunity for defining common criteria in that regard.

21. In the belief that settling displaced persons as close as possible to their homes was generally the best solution, Switzerland would encourage the parties concerned to cooperate more closely with UNHCR in responding to any emergency needs that might arise in the former Yugoslavia with the onset of winter. In addition, the Swiss Disaster Relief Corps had substantial means at its disposal to contribute to the direct assistance winter preparedness programme, whose success would depend on increased coordination between humanitarian bodies, national relief agencies and non-governmental organizations. UNHCR would have to be in a position to strengthen its operational capacities, especially when launching its programme to provide shelter for the homeless. Switzerland would also be prepared to second experts to UNHCR with a view to improving the coordination of humanitarian activities in Geneva or in the field, not only in Yugoslavia, but also in other areas where UNHCR was active.

22. Despite some encouraging signs in Cambodia, in Central America and in southern Africa, the general refugee situation had been aggravated by serious crises in the Horn of Africa and in Europe. Events which only recently had been regarded as exceptional, such as the exodus of the Iraqi Kurds, seemed fated to be repeated and the resulting impact on UNHCR's budget was a matter of concern to donor countries, which were themselves facing increasing financial difficulties. UNHCR's total budget had in fact gone beyond the ceiling of US$ 1 billion, a level higher than the 1991 budget, which itself had been regarded as exceptional, but Switzerland would, as far as its means allowed, make every effort to continue to respond to the High Commissioner's appeals. In that connection, a number of improvements would need to be made in the management of general programmes. Sweden's proposals for increasing the Emergency Fund, the Overall Allocation for Voluntary Repatriation and the Programme Reserve should make it possible to introduce more flexibility into the management of such programmes. The proposals should nevertheless be subjected to a more detailed review at the next meeting of the Sub-Committee on Administrative and Financial Matters.

23. Similarly, the tragedies now unfolding in Africa had no parallel with the problems arising elsewhere, especially in the former Yugoslavia, and it was only by approaches combining humanitarian relief with political solutions and by close collaboration between UNHCR, ICRC and non-governmental organizations that the worst could be avoided. He expressed the hope that the Conference on Somalia, which was due to be held the following week in Geneva, would focus on the search for a comprehensive solution for the Horn of Africa and achieve substantial results.

24. Concerning possible durable solutions for refugee problems, he believed that, there, too, a comprehensive approach should be adopted, combining repatriation and development assistance with a focus on displaced persons,

returnees and the local populations hosting them. The process set in motion by the International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA) was a good example of such an approach, not only because of the links it established at each of those levels, but also because it had given UNHCR and UNDP an opportunity to conclude an agreement whereby each agency could concentrate exclusively on activities within its competence.

25. UNHCR, like other humanitarian agencies, was having problems in guaranteeing the safety of those of its staff who were working in the field in situations of open conflict and he paid tribute to the courage of those who were striving, often at the risk of their lives, to bring relief to refugees. He commended the dedication of the staff of UNHCR and pledged his support to Mrs. Ogata in the enormous task her Office was carrying out.

26. Mr. SSALI (Uganda) said that he also paid tribute to the High Commissioner, who had mobilized international support for the funding of refugee emergency relief and programmes, and to her staff, who were continuing to carry out UNHCR's work under extremely difficult circumstances.

27. Experience had shown that, if refugee problems were to be solved, there was a need first of all to tackle their root causes: the prime cause was poverty and economic backwardness, especially in developing countries, which were crippled by the debt burden and suffered from unacceptably low financial returns from their exports. That was a situation which the more affluent countries could effectively remedy by giving financial encouragement to entrepreneurial development and by rescheduling, or even cancelling, debts. Developing countries, especially refugee-generating countries, had a moral obligation to maintain law and order and to ensure that justice was done, so that their people would be able to enjoy a climate of peace in which to engage in activities that would promote prosperity and well-being. Thanks to the policies which were being followed by the new Government of Uganda and which focused on national reconciliation and respect for human rights, over 500,000 Ugandan refugees had returned home since 1986.

28. Humanitarian aid agencies could also combat the crises to which refugee movements gave rise by intervening rapidly in serious emergencies. As an example, Lifeline Sudan, following the intensification of conflicts in southern Sudan, had made deliveries of food and other essential items to the thousands of persons who would otherwise have sought asylum in Uganda.

29. Now that peace and stability had been re-established in Uganda, the country was regarded as a safe haven and was currently hosting over 200,000 refugees - Sudanese, Rwandese, Zaireans and others. Their arrival had placed a severe strain in the resources of the local population, which in the past had never benefited from the services extended to refugees because they had always been inadequate as a result of the low-input from UNHCR. The Government of Uganda hoped that the Office would introduce development-oriented projects for river transport in the Arua district, road networks, social infrastructure and farming subsidies, which would promote the socio-economic integration of the refugees and of the communities in which they lived.

30. The prolonged drought which had stricken the country had drastically reduced the refugees' daily food ration of maize and beans, resulting in a sharp increase in cases of malnutrition in the transit camps in the Moyo district, chiefly among children of under 10 years of age. The World Food Programme had taken steps to remedy that situation, but any reduction in the flow of refugee food supplies could have very serious consequences and all parties concerned should guard against such an eventuality. Owing to a shortage of drugs, morbidity and mortality had increased in the refugee camps. Those shortages were the result partly of the large numbers of refugees and partly of the inability of the Government of Uganda to purchase drugs in sufficient quantities on account of its low earnings from the coffee exports on which the country depended. In such circumstances, it was important that the competent agencies should appeal to donor countries for the necessary resources to provide drugs both for the refugees and for the populations in areas where they were settled.

31. With regard to Uganda's efforts to find durable solutions to the refugee problem, he drew particular attention to the fact that the Government was trying to integrate refugees by making them grants of land which would allow them to be self-sufficient; some 25,000 were to be settled on arable land in the Arua district, while 4,000 Zairians had already been transferred to the Kyaka settlement. The authorities were also providing security and other basic services in those areas.

32. One of his Government's major concerns was to protect the environment by preventing the senseless exploitation of natural resources. The presence of refugees put pressure on the tree cover, which was used for fuel and building materials. If officials of the departments concerned had not intervened in time, the refugees settled in Kiryandongo would quickly have transformed the area into a semi-desert. The task now was to reforest the affected areas and to find the refugees alternative sources of fuel and building materials, failing which no further land grants could be made. The Government hoped that it could obtain international aid for that purpose.

33. Uganda welcomed the fact that the Government of Rwanda and the Rwanda Patriotic Front had begun peace talks in Arusha with a view to ending the civil war which had lasted for nearly two years. A negotiated settlement of the problem could not but benefit Rwandese refugees. In that regard, it should be noted that the claims by the Government of Rwanda that Uganda was allowing rebels to take refuge on its territory had been refuted by an international fact-finding mission. Uganda was committed to the establishment and maintenance of peace in the East African region.

34. Lastly, he paid tribute to the role played by the UNHCR branch office in Kampala in coordinating the implementation of refugee programmes and activities in Uganda, as well as to the role of donor countries and various organizations in making it possible for his country to host the refugees.

35. Mr. KHAN (Pakistan), referring to the situation of Afghan refugees in Pakistan, recalled that, at the same time the previous year, the future of those persons had still been highly uncertain. The voluntary repatriation programme for Afghan refugees, launched in July 1990 by a number of agencies, including UNHCR, jointly with the Government of Pakistan, had been making very

little progress. Nevertheless, the Government had insisted that the programme should be continued and UNHCR had followed its lead. Subsequent developments, following the collapse of the Soviet-backed regime in Kabul, had proved that decision a wise one. Immediately on assuming office, the new Secretary-General of the United Nations had made efforts to find a durable political solution to the Afghan imbroglio in collaboration with all parties involved in the conflict. His bold moves had borne fruit, since the accord signed in Peshawar the previous April, setting up a mechanism for political transition and establishing a Mujahidin Government in Kabul under the leadership of Sibghatullah Mojaddedi, had won a broad measure of support among Afghan Mujahidin. Pakistan sincerely hoped that the new Afghan leaders would succeed in overcoming the difficulties involved in transition and in steering their country towards the rebuilding of its infrastructure and the rehabilitation of its war-ravaged economy.

36. Despite the difficulties awaiting them, Afghan refugees had started to return to their country the moment the new regime in Afghanistan had been established. However, the average weekly rate of repatriation, which at one time had been as high as 90,000, had now fallen to around 40,000, a decline which was attributable in part to the lack of necessary resources to finance certain aspects of the repatriation programme and in part to the onset of winter. Fleeing the fighting around Kabul, 60,000 Afghans had arrived to swell the ranks of their compatriots who were already refugees in Pakistan and who still numbered some 1.9 million. In such circumstances, it was vital that United Nations agencies and donor countries should intensify their efforts to create conditions in Afghanistan conducive to the economic and social reintegration of returnees and others who would follow them, especially by providing employment opportunities.

37. In the meantime, the feeding and maintenance of Afghans who had remained in Pakistan had to be ensured. In 1991, the wheat requirement of those refugees had largely been met for the first time since the World Food Programme had launched its feeding programme on their behalf in 1980. Although Pakistan was grateful to the international community for those contributions in kind, cash contributions to UNHCR's humanitarian assistance programme had fallen to the lowest level ever recorded. The shrinkage in aid made the task of the Government of Pakistan extremely difficult: between March 1991 and March 1992, it had had to cut its staff employed on refugee relief programmes by over 60 per cent. It was vital that the country should be provided with sufficient resources to pursue such programmes if Afghan refugees were not to suffer as a result.

38. The presence of Afghan refugees and their livestock had caused serious environmental degradation over the years. A study by UNDP experts had shown that the damage caused in some areas was almost irreversible and that the rehabilitation of the affected areas would require enormous financial resources. UNDP had identified a number of high priority projects which needed to be undertaken at a cost of US$ 102 million. Accordingly, Pakistan was appealing to the generosity of donors.

39. Since 1984, Pakistan had been implementing an income-generating project for refugees, with active support from UNHCR and the World Bank. The cost of the third phase of that project was estimated at US$ 26 million. In that

connection as well, the Government was appealing for financial support from donor countries. All the measures envisaged under the project were essential if the humanitarian efforts undertaken on behalf of Afghan refugees were to be successful.

40. Mr. ATRIANFAR (Islamic Republic of Iran) said the complexity of the refugee problem in its current form could be realistically addressed only in a global context, taking into account its various political, social, economic and cultural aspects, and the relationships between them. There was also a need for a definition of the concept of refugee based on new realities.

41. The refugee problem was a by-product of the injustice of the international system, which had given rise to the development gap between rich and poor nations, the destabilization of the economic and social infrastructures of developing countries, policies of aggression, conflicts, crises, tensions, wars, and human rights violations, all of which led eventually to population movements. Iran, which was host to one of the largest refugee populations in the world, believed that it made little sense to seek solutions to the problem without taking account of its root causes. As had been recognized by the General Assembly and the Executive Committee in many resolutions, as well as by the member countries of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), it was only by promoting countries' economic growth and social development that new refugee movements could be prevented.

42. He deplored the human tragedy which was unfolding in the former Yugoslavia and stated that many countries, including his own, as well as international and non-governmental organizations, had sent hundreds of tons of humanitarian aid to refugees and displaced persons in that part of the world. If those humanitarian measures could be supplemented by a determined political will on the part of all members of the international community, it should be possible to put an end to Serbia's inhuman actions and to find a viable and acceptable solution to the crisis.

43. The Islamic Republic of Iran was currently hosting almost 3,728,000 refugees, of whom 2,747,000 were Afghans and 981,380 Iraqis, the rest being from Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan and Bangladesh. That total showed a decrease of 7.3 per cent in comparison with the figure reported to the forty-second session of the Executive Committee, as a result of the repatriation process now taking place among the country's various refugee populations.

44. The total UNHCR budgetary allocation for assistance to nearly 4 million refugees in Iran, as part of the general programmes budget, had been kept at around $15 million, or $4 per refugee, a figure which, surprising as it might seem, reflected the actual level of international aid to refugees in Iran over the past decade. Food distribution by the World Food Programme was currently reaching only 7 per cent of Afghan and Iraqi refugees. Under those circumstances, the Islamic Republic of Iran had had to intensify its efforts to compensate for the inadequacy of international assistance. The Government had thus launched a social security programme for refugees which met the basic needs of 55,000 additional refugees and provided them with employment. In addition, it had distributed 780,000 food coupons to Afghan and Iraqi refugees in 1992. Such vast assistance programmes funded by the Government not only

exceeded international aid, but made international contributions to refugee assistance activities seem marginal by comparison.

45. Following the establishment in Afghanistan of a Government involving the participation of the major Mujahidin groups, the repatriation of nearly 2,770,000 Afghan refugees had become one of the Government's major priorities. It had submitted to UNHCR its plan of action for the implementation of that programme, which involved setting up urban, interim and transit camps. Under a memorandum of understanding concluded between the Islamic Government of Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and UNHCR, a tripartite commission had been set up to ensure that the repatriation and reintegration of Afghan refugees into their society of origin was effected following a safe and regular procedure. Despite its limited budget, the Islamic Republic of Iran had declared its readiness to launch the return of Afghan refugees, under the auspices of UNHCR, while the voluntary repatriation of nearly 193,000 refugees, which had begun early that year, was continuing without support or assistance from the international community. In that regard, he thanked the Government of Japan for its substantial contribution to that operation. If the international community responded generously to the recent appeal by the Secretary-General of the United Nations on behalf of the reconstruction of Afghanistan, that would certainly enable Iran to assist in the repatriation of a considerable number of Afghan refugees between now and the end of the year, as envisaged under the programmes.

46. In June 1992, the Islamic Republic of Iran had organized, jointly with UNHCR, a three-day seminar in which 18 major non-governmental organizations had participated. The seminar had provided an opportunity for those organizations to familiarize themselves with the refugee situation in Iran and to ask refugees themselves about their needs and about possible solutions to their tragic plight. In accordance with the seminar's conclusions, Iran had recently set up a special group entitled "Commission for the Coordination of NGO Activities in the Islamic Republic of Iran", which was to serve as a focal point for the facilitation and coordination of all NGO activities, whether in refugee assistance or in development projects.

47. He also drew the attention of the members of the Executive Committee to an initiative taken by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to avert new refugee flows across the northern borders of its territory. Following the exacerbation of hostilities between Azerbaijan and Armenia and, in particular, the conflict that had broken out in the Sadrak region, the Government, fearing an influx of over 15,000 refugees, had set up a reception camp equipped to provide emergency assistance, such as food and medical supplies. That initiative had proved to be a good example of a preventive measure which had effectively halted refugee movements. In that connection, he welcomed the establishment of the Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator and announced that the Islamic Republic of Iran would be ready to share with that Office the experience it had gained in the course of various natural or man-made disasters.

48. In conclusion, he said that he was deeply concerned by the humanitarian implications of the turn events were taking in northern and southern Iraq. Following the creation of a semi-autonomous State in Iraqi Kurdistan, the 3 million inhabitants of that area were increasingly faced with food and fuel

shortages. There were alarming indications that another human tragedy might be building up in that area, and perhaps also in the south.

49. Mr. LANG (Austria) said that the scale and complexity of the emergencies that had arisen in the course of the past 12 months had severely tested UNHCR's emergency response mechanism, but, in the face of that situation, the Office's response capacity had been shown to be one of the most efficient in the United Nations system.

50. Despite the increase in the total number of refugees in the world, the beginnings of a solution to the problem could be seen in many parts of the world, notably in Asia, Central America and some parts of Africa. Thus, over 90 per cent of the some 1.8 million Iraqi refugees in the Islamic Republic of Iran and in Turkey had been rapidly repatriated. In addition, positive trends were discernible in Cambodia, Viet Nam, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, in Afghanistan, in Angola, in Mozambique, and in other countries of Africa and in Central America within the framework of the International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA). Austria was aware of the importance of voluntary repatriation and had contributed to a number of repatriation operations, particularly in Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia and South Africa. However, it believed that, like UNDP, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs could play a catalytic role in supplementing voluntary repatriation by rehabilitation and reintegration measures.

51. There could be no doubt that human rights violations were often the cause of refugee movements. Austria therefore urged the High Commissioner to continue to cooperate closely with the Commission on Human Rights and the Centre for Human Rights and, in particular, to participate in preparations for the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights. It would also be useful for UNHCR to collaborate with the Secretary-General's special representative on internally displaced persons.

52. His delegation attached great importance to the subject of refugee women and children, a group which represented 80 per cent of the world's refugee population. Thanks to the appointment of special coordinators, the plight of such women and children was no longer marginalized and the first results of coordination activities were already evident.

53. The volume of material assistance activities raised a further question. For the first time in UNHCR's history, the total volume of assistance programmes would be breaking the US$ 1 billion barrier. He was nevertheless concerned to note that special programmes, and particularly those undertaken at the request of the Secretary-General, had grown disproportionately by comparison with general programmes. That situation, as well as the question of the growth in the overall volume of activities, should be watched closely.

54. In connection with UNHCR's regular programme activities, some delegations had raised the question whether the Programme Reserve should not be increased by 15 per cent to allow for an adjustment in programme activities within the limits of general programme targets, rather than resorting to appeals for special funding. Similar suggestions had been made in the past and had always been supported by his delegation.

55. The armed conflict now raging in the former Yugoslavia had created over 2.8 million displaced persons, tens of thousands of whom had been subjected, and were still being subjected, to indiscriminate repression. With the onset of winter, thousands of them were in danger of dying of hunger and access to victims had now become vital. The Executive Committee should appeal to the co-Chairmen of the London Conference to intensify their action in the political field so that UNHCR, ICRC and the non-governmental organizations concerned could have access to civilian victims of the conflict. In that connection, Austria endorsed the appeals by the Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in the former Yugoslavia, Mr. Mazowiecki, that all parties should adhere strictly to the principles of international humanitarian law.

56. The theory of temporary protection, which had figured prominently in the discussions of the Sub-Committee on International Protection, had been put into practice for the first time in assisting the Croatians, most of whom had since returned to their homes under a tripartite agreement concluded between Croatia, UNHCR and Austria. Over 60,000 displaced persons from regions affected by the civil war in Bosnia and Herzegovina were currently benefiting from such protection.

57. In addition, Austria had funded a substantial humanitarian assistance programme in the region. Some US$ 16 million had been allocated by the Federal Government to bilateral and multilateral projects, while the provincial Governments had contributed a further US$ 6 million. Together with individual contributions made by the Austrian people, that brought the total amount of Austria's financial assistance to the victims of that tragic war to over US$ 100 million. In a spirit of solidarity, the Government of Austria intended to continue its humanitarian assistance in the former Yugoslavia, giving priority to the following areas: continuation of projects for refugees and displaced persons already under way; assistance to local authorities, primarily in Croatia, in creating winter-proof shelter for refugees; support for reintegration programmes launched by the Croatian Government; and medical treatment in Austria for the injured, as well as for particularly vulnerable persons for whom such treatment was not available in the former Yugoslavia.

58. A clear distinction had to be drawn between refugee movements, on the one hand, and migrations or other population movements, on the other. Like most other countries in Western Europe, the vast majority of requests for asylum received by Austria (some 90 per cent) were not from refugees. That situation clearly showed that abuse of the procedure for applying for refugee status by migrants, economic or otherwise, undermined the whole institution of asylum. Furthermore, such abuses involved a disproportionate expenditure of public funds which could better be used in assisting those who were genuine refugees and who were in real need. It was for those reasons that Austria, like other countries, had established accelerated procedures, especially for claims that were manifestly unfounded, and was trying to harmonize those procedures with those of other countries.

59. Lastly, he expressed his Government's deep appreciation of what UNHCR and its partners - including non-governmental organizations - had achieved under extremely difficult circumstances and paid tribute to the memory of those who had given their lives in the service of humanity.

60. Mgr. PIERRE (Holy See) said the report of the High Commissioner (A/AC.96/793) showed that, in the course of the past year, UNHCR had become involved in areas of activity that were as yet unexplored. That should be a further encouragement to the international community to grant it the resources it needed to strengthen its response capacity, so that it could respond rapidly to new emergencies. It should also be supported in its search for durable solutions and in the initiatives it had taken to prevent refugee flows.

61. The Holy See welcomed the increasing recognition that UNHCR's competence extended to persons forced to leave their homes as a result of armed conflict, serious and widespread disturbances or acts of violence. It should be possible for the same reasoning to be applied to persons who were internally displaced for similar reasons.

62. However, the international community could not overlook the fact that, together with political divergencies, ethnic conflicts and other types of confrontation, poverty and the factors that caused it were among the prime reasons for political instability. It was therefore not surprising that the majority of refugees came from developing countries.

63. In its search for solutions, the international community should be guided by a willingness to respect the human rights of all refugees. Refugees were not merely assisted persons; they shared the same rights and obligations as others. It followed that their protection should include all the conditions necessary for a fully human existence.

64. Unfortunately, assistance to refugees was now being hampered by fears of too large an increase in their numbers, as well as of clashes with other cultures, and there was thus an urgent need to foster a more receptive attitude. In order to identify the causes which led people to flee their homes and to find durable solutions, internationally acceptable rules should be adopted on territorial asylum. The search for common solutions was essential and arguments which made the granting of the right of asylum subject to the sole criterion of national interest should be refuted.

65. The matter fell squarely within the responsibilities of States, particularly if they were democratic and economically developed: inaction, or inadequate efforts on their part would be in contradiction with the principles they rightly considered to be fundamental to their culture, which was based on the premise that all were equal in dignity. Such States should do everything in their power to remedy the root causes of the refugee problem.

66. In addition, the protection of the human rights of displaced persons would require the adoption by the international community of specific legal instruments and appropriate coordination mechanisms, so that intervention by it could no longer be considered as violations of national sovereignty.

67. The Churches, in collaboration with other institutions, had a major role to play in offering refugees the welcome, solidarity and assistance they needed. They could mobilize energies and work towards ensuring that societies and Governments adopted more open attitudes. They were already involved in

that task and the aid agencies they sponsored were active on the front line wherever refugees were to be found.

68. Much of the burden of providing assistance to refugees fell to neighbouring countries, which did not always have enough resources. Accordingly, that burden should be equally shared by the international community. UNHCR was rightly working along those lines.

69. Refugee status was, by definition, transitory. A refugee could and should aspire to return to his country as soon as conditions had returned to normal and as soon as his life and liberty were no longer in danger.

70. When integration in a country was not feasible, it was UNHCR's task to insist that refugees should be protected from discrimination, refoulement and expulsion, that they should be treated humanely and that their fundamental rights should be respected. In addition, women and children, as indicated in the information papers concerning them, deserved special attention.

71. Temporary protection was often provided in camps: since such camps sometimes proved necessary, they should be organized to allow life to go on. A camp could be regarded only as an emergency situation and, consequently, as a temporary arrangement.

72. The principle of voluntary repatriation could not be called in question. Recent events showed that many persons had been sent back against their will to a sometimes tragic fate, either by sea or through minefields, where they had met their deaths.

73. His delegation shared the High Commissioner's view that voluntary repatriation should be envisaged as a truly durable and humanitarian solution. To that end, it should be accompanied by comprehensive reintegration and rehabilitation measures designed to meet immediate, short-term and long-term needs and to promote self-sufficiency and development both for the returnees themselves and for the communities affected.

74. In conclusion, he stressed that the refugee cause was central to the concerns of the Catholic Church. A few days earlier, the Papal Council "Cor Unum" and the Papal Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Displaced Persons had published a document entitled "Refugees, a challenge to solidarity". Indeed, solidarity on the part of the communities welcoming refugees and the organizations taking responsibility for their welfare was the only attitude that could eliminate the factors that caused such human tragedies.

75. Mr. UKAWA (Japan) said that, since the last meeting of the Executive Committee, there had been an increasing number of emergencies and crises around the world. The flow of refugees which had resulted had overstretched UNHCR's capacities. The High Commissioner and her staff had nevertheless responded with commitment and compassion. Staff in the field were working in difficult situations and, in some cases, were risking their lives.

76. During the past year, some progress had been made, particularly with regard to voluntary repatriation. Under the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese Refugees, voluntary repatriation to Viet Nam had continued steadily. Large numbers of persons had also returned to South Africa and Angola. Since March 1992, the repatriation component of the peace-keeping operation in Cambodia had already enabled one third of the refugees to return. The High Commissioner expected all Cambodian refugees in Thailand to have returned home by early 1993 in time to take part in the elections. In Afghanistan, over 1 million returns from Pakistan and Iran had been recorded. Japan, for its part, had made a substantial contribution to UNHCR's programme in the countries concerned and would continue to provide assistance, since the repatriation process was as yet far from completion.

77. However, the success of voluntary repatriation operations depended on the reintegration of returnees into their country of origin, and that called for sustained international support for rehabilitation and reconstruction, which were clearly outside UNHCR's mandate and would depend on close coordination between agencies, non-governmental organizations and the Governments concerned.

78. In the former Yugoslavia, as in Somalia, no political solution was in sight and, as a result, there was a massive need for humanitarian assistance that was a major challenge for UNHCR and the international community. Japan endorsed the action taken by UNHCR to assist displaced persons in the former Yugoslavia; however, it believed that the Office should be cautious about moving outside its traditional sphere of activities, particularly in view of its own limited financial and human resources. The possibility of burden-sharing with other agencies should be further explored.

79. The concept of "temporary protection" pending the eventual return of refugees to their countries should also be given further consideration.

80. Now that the total number of refugees had reached 17 million, UNHCR's budget was expected to exceed US$ 1 billion for the first time; that figure reflected the extent of the international community's support. UNHCR would have to redouble its efforts to achieve efficient administration, improved transparency and financial accountability if it was to secure the continued support of donors. Japan would continue to be one of the major donors; in 1992, as in 1991, its contribution had been over US$ 100 million. Public information activities directed towards donor countries had also been a significant element in UNHCR's success.

81. After an extensive debate in Parliament, Japan had adopted legislation enabling it to send forces to Cambodia as part of the United Nations transitional authority in that country. His country also shared the general concern about the issue of environmental preservation; in response to the High Commissioner's appeal, it was ready to make a contribution by making the services of an environmental coordinator and funding for that purpose available to UNHCR.

82. Mr. MOSAASE (Lesotho), expressing his delegation's confidence in the High Commissioner, said that the cornerstone of any solution to the refugee problem was the achievement of peace. Without it, repression and persecution

would always create yet more refugees. In that connection, he deplored the increase in violence in the country bordering on his own. It was to be feared that anarchy might prevail and that an influx of refugees into Lesotho would result. Since the beginning of the year, his country had also been receiving asylum-seekers from Central and even West Africa, the majority being Zairians. Unfortunately, Lesotho was affected by drought and rising unemployment; it had nevertheless been applying United Nations resolutions, especially on non-refoulement.

83. In less than two months, Lesotho would be holding the first general election for 22 years; it was to be hoped that the newly elected Government would respect the laws applicable to refugees. In that connection, he deplored the statement made in paragraph 1.25.28 of document A/AC.96/793 (Part I) and reserved his delegation's position on any decision that might be taken on the matter at the current session.

84. Mr. BENHIMA (Morocco) said that, although the end of the cold war had made it possible to find political solutions to a number of conflicts, the current international context, whose features were not easy to define, was unfortunately characterized by an outbreak of ethnic and religious conflicts. Document A/AC.96/798 and the introductory statement by the High Commissioner gave a detailed account of the situation of refugees, who numbered 17 million; finding a solution to their problems would be an enormous task. It would call for increased solidarity on the part of the international community and mean that even greater financial resources had to be made available to the Office. In particular, there was a need to strengthen UNHCR's emergency response capacity, together with that of other United Nations agencies, such as WHO, UNICEF and WFP, and of non-governmental organizations.

85. As far as voluntary repatriation was concerned, he noted that encouraging results had been achieved in Central America, Afghanistan and Cambodia. Such actions should be encouraged in other regions of the world, particularly in view of the fact that voluntary repatriation had been shown to speed up the achievement of political solutions.

86. With regard to international protection, his delegation welcomed the continuation of the work of the Working Group on International Protection. The adaptation of the basic principles of international protection would lead to satisfactory results only if it took account of both the interests of States and the rights of refugees in a climate of cooperation, flexibility and transparency. Cooperation between humanitarian relief agencies and human rights bodies was also essential.

87. Since women and children accounted for 80 per cent of the refugees in the world, his delegation was pleased to note that, in the past few years, UNHCR had been intensifying its efforts to assist those particularly vulnerable persons. In that connection, the funding by the Norwegian Government of the post of Senior Coordinator for Refugee Children was a praiseworthy initiative.

88. In Africa, which had 30 per cent of the world's refugees, there were two areas of special needs, Somalia and Mozambique, which were suffering from a combination of civil war and severe drought. The international community

should make special efforts to give speedy relief to the populations concerned.

89. The conflict now raging in the former Yugoslavia was an unprecedented humanitarian problem that was being aggravated by systematic human rights violations in the name of "ethnic cleansing". The generous response by the international community to UNHCR's appeals had made it possible to bring some relief to the populations affected. The Moroccan Government was planning to send a consignment of food aid, and was currently studying ways of delivering it. In that connection, he hoped that the talks that had started in Geneva between the warring factions would lead to a political solution.

90. Lastly, he pointed out that, on the basis of Security Council resolution 681 (1990) and of the recommendations of the Executive Committee, Palestinian refugees should be given full protection in accordance with the international instruments in force.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.